

silent, staring dreamily into the fire, but his companion, the sailor, sat beside him, talking earnestly.

'Is that you, Oliver lad?' said the farmer, without turning his head. 'Children! get you off upstairs; your mother's there, and she wants you.'

They vanished in silence, awed by their father's unwonced gravity, and silently Oliver drew nearer to the fire.

'It's thy father they're talking about, lad,' his uncle went on. 'They have known him in foreign parts, it seems, and come round here to give us news of him.'

The lad made no answer. For a moment he stood still, and the silent stranger lifted his dark restless eyes and looked at him, and met a look as strange and questioning as his own—a look of defiance, and yet of fear.

'Well!' said Oliver at last, in a tone that seemed to himself not like his own; and then he came a step forward and leaned against the high mantelshelf, still looking and looking, and hearing as in a dream the sailor's glib hoarse voice, with a curious hint of caution and apology in it.

'I don't know what he done,' the sailor was saying. 'But it was a long while ago, and it stands to reason it must be pretty well forgotten. I daresay it made a stir in a bit of a quiet place like this; but the thing is, would any one cast it up at him if he was to come back and settle down hereabouts?'

There was a pause. The farmer hesi-

tated, rubbing his chin in thoughtful silence. And still the sailor's mute comrade looked at Oliver, and the young fellow looked steadily back at him.

'I've no wish to be hard,' said John Haythorn at last, slowly and almost unwillingly. 'He is my own flesh and blood; I can't deny that. But he disgraced himself and us all, and he's been away this many years; and by what I've heard his goings-on haven't been what would suit respectable folks in a respectable place. He's away, and he'd best keep away. I don't see as his coming back could make anything but trouble.'

'Wait a bit,' said the elder man, breaking silence almost for the first time. 'There's this young chap here. As his business as much as anybody's, and he's said nought yet. Do *you* think the same as your uncle—that the further your father is, and the longer he stays away, the better?'

As in a dream, Oliver was aware that he tried to speak and failed. He had to moisten his dry lips before they could form a word. But he had set his face like a flint, and he would not let his eyes swerve from their half-defiant look into those other eyes—so strangely like his own!

'I—don't remember my father,' he said at last, slowly, as if the words were hard to find. 'I was only four years old when he—went away. I—agree with my uncle. I think he—had better—not—come back!'

(To be continued.)

Mrs. Huckerby.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

FERGUS passed a week in bed, more or less ill, and then, a spell of sunshine and west wind intervening, he recovered so far as to sit up in his chair, and to do a bit of his beloved carving.

He now did not object very much to Mrs. Huckerby's inspection of the panels, and groups of fruit and flowers, he had fashioned with such industry and care.

Mrs. Huckerby was by no means an art critic, and it did not strike her mind that there was any particular skill needed to produce these facsimiles of Nature—the